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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000493

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STATE FOR EUR/NB, WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [CU](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: NORWAY'S CUBA POLICIES: LIBERTAD ACT REVIEW

REF: A) STATE 57782

B) OSLO 77

C) 2005 OSLO 1730

Classified By: Acting Political/Economic Counselor Doug Apostol,
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Norway's young center-left government is engaged in a controversial balancing act on Cuba, publicly supporting Cuban dissidents while also seeking a broader dialogue with Cuba. With the exception of an impending oil drilling contract, Norwegian business interests in Cuba are scant at best. Cultural exchanges are also minimal, but do exist. Finally, there have been no high-level Cuban diplomatic visits in Norway during the last six months. End summary.

Democracy Record Mixed: Support Dissidents, Engage Government

¶2. (C) On April 19 we met with Herberth Linder, Office Director in the MFA's Latin American Affairs Section, and Section Deputy Hege Araldsen to discuss Norway's policies toward Cuba. Per ref A, we reviewed the current state of Cuban-Norwegian relations, including the status of Norwegian business activity in Cuba. Linder confirmed that the current center-left government will not invite Cuban dissidents to Norway's national day event on May 17 (ref B), a reversal of the prior center-right government's policy. The current government believes that the practice of including Cuban dissidents hindered Norway's engagement in direct dialogue with the Cuban government. Linder was quick to point out that inviting dissidents to the national day festivities made it "difficult to work with the Cubans," and precluded the Norwegian government from raising human rights issues. Additionally, the current government views inviting dissidents to national day celebrations as "impractical." Linder linked the policy reversal to Norway's commercial interests, commenting that Norwegian businesses were "not allowed to cross the threshold" as long as the practice was in place. Despite the new policy, Linder stressed that Norway strongly supported imprisoned Cuban dissidents and their families, citing its cash support and purchase of medicines (in cooperation with the Catholic Church) on their behalf.

Norwegian Business Interests in Cuba Minimal

¶3. (C) Norwegian business interests are essentially limited to a single joint venture among the Norwegian energy/aluminum firm Norsk Hydro, Spain's Repsol and India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ref C). The joint venture is seeking to develop offshore oil resources in Cuba's Exclusive Economic Zone. There are no recent cases of Norwegian firms violating Title III of the Libertad Act. The MFA's Araldsen noted that

the Norwegian business community has shown little interest in Cuba, so Title III has not been much of an issue. Also, there are no trade agreements between Cuba and Norway. The leading economic activity between the two country is tourism, with an estimated 5,000 Norwegians visiting Cuba annually.

Exchange Programs: "Enemy of the People" in Havana

14. (C) Linder cited a number of cultural and educational exchange programs between Norway and Cuba, including one sponsored by the Maritime Institute in Bergen (which trains some post-graduate students in Cuba). Norwegian musical and drama troupes have performed in Cuba, including a recent company that performed Henrik Ibsen's "Enemy of the People" in Havana. The Norwegian town of Fredrikstad has also given some support to Cuban cinema. With respect to clubs and organizations in Norway sympathetic to Cuba, Linder noted the existence of a pro-Cuban society in Oslo (which, curiously enough, shares the same address and telephone number as the Norwegian Communist Party).

No Recent High Level Diplomatic Visits

15. (C) There have been no official high-level Cuban visits to Norway within the last six months. Cuban trade union officials normally attend the annual Norwegian congress of trade unions. Norwegian parliamentarians from the Christian Democrat party visited Cuba in 2005.
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